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## *The White Geese*

D. Lynn Smith

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## Mythcon 52: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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was meant to be there, no bones about it, no arguments made.

The sky turned milky. Dressing the starry navy blue sky in a shimmering film of silver, the mobyllium fluttered in the winter wind, rustling like fat leaves on a tropical tree. In northern countries people bundled into parkas and mittens and sat in the snow to watch the sheets and count stars that twinkled in the gaps between. They gave wassail parties to welcome the new millennium and bathed their babies in warm rum. In the South people lay on the ground and fell asleep gazing at the fluttering sheets. They ran through opalescent air, told extrusion jokes, and floated in mobyllium seas.

Three days passed and the sheets came down. Cristo and Xinthatius appeared on TV to receive the newly formed Le Bon prize for art donated by the French painter-politician, Derfla Le Bon. To give himself surprises as a child, Cristo said, he had wrapped things up and asked his mother to hide them. When he came across the packages it was like getting toys for Christmas since the bundles never failed to contain what he really wanted.

Editions Demonique published the book on Operation Tie-up, a \$75.00 volume with color plates throughout. At 47 pounds the book was too heavy for most coffee tables so a dolly was marketed to haul it around. The dolly cost \$40.00 but sales were brisk; despite the added expense and inconvenience, people were more than willing to make a

commitment to the memory of how the planet was discovered once again.

## A PASTORAL SONNET

by Joe R. Christopher

On ancient hills of Arcady, in Greece,  
the shepherds watched their sheep, each flock alone;  
the goatherds herded goats, and made their moan—  
both played their flutes and sang of love's increase.  
Those lonely herders, for months without release,  
with only sheep and goats about them strown,  
played on their pipes, and sighed, and gave their groan,  
and dreamed of love upon a simple fleece.

An early, rustic time, a natural time,  
when songs soon led to bestiality—  
and herders fell from primal urgings fell;  
then sheepish ewes had fauns, in mythic prime,  
and goatish dams had satyrs, rare progeny—  
whose outward forms their inward spirits tell.

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## THE WHITE GEESE

by D. Lynn Smith

"Myths reveal the structure of reality, and the multiple modalities of being in the world...they disclose the true stories, concern themselves with reality."

-- Eliade

The geese have come early this year. They flew in before the rains stopped, before the weather warmed. They always hated the dreary grey skies of the California winter so I was surprised to see them.

I first saw Robert in Reseda Park seven years ago. His hair stuck together in greasy, brown spikes. He wore a drab army jacket whose shoulder seams hung halfway down his arms and faded blue jeans that hadn't seen the inside of a washing machine in quite some time. He was skinny as a rail, had serious, dark brown eyes, and was wiser than a body should be at twelve years old.

It was a beautiful spring day and the pond was filling up with noisy ducks attempting to attract a mate. He came and stood beside me as I untwisted the top of a bag of stale bread. I handed him a piece of crust to throw to the gathering flock. He ate it.

It's sad to see how many children go unwanted these days. Oh Robert had a mama. He also had a stepfather who hated him. Robert's mama preferred the stepfather. It's not that she was a bad woman. She just felt that her responsibility lay with her husband rather than her child. She gave Robert a place to sleep. But he had to be gone by the time his stepfather got up in the morning and couldn't come home until all the lights were out at night.

"Just stay out of his way," Robert's mama told him.  
And Robert did.

So on that fine spring day I found myself with this dirty stray pup eating the crumbs I had brought for the ducks. I always was an easy mark for strays.

I gave Robert three meals a day, made him take a weekly bath, washed his clothes when he took them off to bathe. He gave me much more. I didn't get around very well even in those days. Arthritis, you know. Hit me when I was twenty-three; lived with it for fifty-four years. So he did my mending when my knuckles were so swollen I could no longer grasp a needle. He brought hot water for my feet when I'd done too much walking, then set off to do the

marketing. He'd even brush my hair and braid it down my back the way I liked it.

One day, as Robert plaited my hair, he asked, "Don't you have any children?"

"Nope."

"How come? You would have made a good mother."

I smiled at that, though I knew Robert was just making a statement of fact rather than trying to pay me a compliment. Robert wasn't one for compliments. If you asked him how you looked, you better be prepared for an honest answer.

"Well, I never had me a man."

Robert's fingers carefully crossed one rope of silver hair over another. "Never?"

Something about the way he asked that made my face warm.

"Well, I had a beau once, when I was a pretty young thing."

"What happened?"

"He went away to war and never came back."

Robert twisted a rubber band around the end of the braid.

"I never found another man who suited me. And that was just fine. I do regret the children, though. It would be nice to have some babies running around calling me Gran."

Robert finished with the rubber band. He slipped his arms around my neck and kissed me softly on the cheek.

"You've got me...Gran."

Then he turned from the room, leaving me to deal with the wake of emotion.

Every Thursday Robert would bring me flowers. They were a little wilted, a little past their prime. I suspect he found them in someone's trash each week. I'd put them in a vase and there they'd stay, even as the petals fell off onto the counter, until the following Thursday. I made a pot-pourri from them. It still sits on the night table next to my bed, though the scent has long since faded.

Robert didn't have a sense of humor. I think that left him when his real daddy did, though I was never quite sure when that was. He wasn't a bitter boy. He was a realist. He looked at life as a schoolroom, and he studied his lessons tirelessly. Problem was, real school has recess. Life doesn't. So even though a smile would flutter over his lips every now and then, it didn't stay around long enough to make a lasting impression. He didn't know the meaning of joy, or happiness, or contentment. Those words were not in the dictionary that life was writing for him. But there were other words: beauty, love, faith. No, faith is not the right word. Nor is belief. Both of those words connote a lack of knowing. Robert didn't just believe, he *knew*. That was the key all along. I realize that now.

Robert liked it best when I read to him. My eyes were still sharp as an eagle's and I always did like the sound of my own voice. So I read often. His favorite was my book of Chumash Oral Narratives. I tell you the way that boy would sit there and ponder each story you'd think he was an Indian himself. I must admit that some of the stories





didn't make any sense to me. Once day I finished one of those myths that seemed so incomprehensible, and yet Robert was nodding his head. I asked him, "Do you understand what the story means, Robert?"

He looked at me with those dark, serious eyes.

"It's like when you listen to your old records, Gran. Your eyes get all far away and misty, and I can see you are remembering a time that really has nothing to do with the words of the song. It would be dumb for me to say, 'What does that song mean, Gran?' Or when I walk into your kitchen and smell the cake you have in the oven, or when I sit next to you and smell your granny smell. It would be dumb to ask me, 'What do those smells mean, Robert?' There is no answer except the answer inside each person's self."

Yes, Robert understood the stories. He understood the magic. He was magic.

The geese have come early this year. I saw them just yesterday, though I suspect they've been around for a day or two, waiting for me to bring out my bag of bread crumbs. Used to be I'd make it to the park every day. I haven't been well, lately, and without Robert and the others, well...

My but they're beautiful. All white. Geese aren't supposed to be all white. They're supposed to have some kind of markings on their wings. But my geese are all white. They're shining angels come to earth for a visit. And they're gentle, taking the crumbs delicately from my hand, allowing me to stroke their long, slender necks.

One day Robert showed up at the park with a boy a little younger than he. A towhead, with startling blue eyes. I gave them both a piece of crust for the birds. Robert threw his into the flock. The towhead ate his.

I ended up with seven in all that summer. Robert brought them into our little family one at a time. Each one had been more or less abandoned by their families. Melissa's mom was a single parent who worked two jobs to make ends meet. Carrie's father sexually abused her. Andy lived in a foster home with six other kids and foster parents who cared more for the money than for the kids themselves. The towhead, Thomas, didn't seem to have a home. At least I never was able to get him to talk about one. Robert took him home at night so he wouldn't sleep in the park. And there were the twins, Dawn and Dee, whose father spent most of his free time looking at the bottom of a beer bottle, blaming them for their mother's untimely death. She died in an automobile accident on the way to pick them up from school.

Now I had seven children who called me Gran, who ate at my table, who tossed crusts of stale bread to the ducks. I read to them every day. Robert insisted that I continue reading from the Chumash book. "They were the first people of California. We are the new ones. We should learn from their stories," he reasoned. I didn't quite understand his logic, but I read the myths all the same.

Certain ones became favorites and had to be repeated each week. I didn't know what Robert was planning then,

though I might have if I'd listened to the stories rather than to the sound of my own voice.

One day when I had a big kettle of soup on the stove, Robert brought the others in and formed a semicircle. "What do you see?" he asked them.

"A pot of soup," answered Melissa.

He turned to face the pot. "I see bubbling water, which comes from the clouds in the sky. The fire beneath the pot is like the sun, which warms all things alike, man and animal. The meat in the soup comes from our animal friends who have given up their lives to feed us. The steam is the water, rising to the sky, to once again become the cloud." He turned and looked at each one of them. "I see this with my heart," he said, "not my head. You must learn to see with your hearts also."

They left my kitchen, leaving me to stare after them.

I found the feathers not long after that. I asked Robert about them. He looked at me with those serious eyes and said, "We're going to be like the boys in the Indian myth." Then he took the bag from my hands, tied up the top, and put it back under the cupboard. He turned and wrapped his arms around my waist. I could feel his body convulsing with sobs and it caught me so off guard that tears wet my own cheeks before I could blink them away.

"Raccoon couldn't go, Gran. They wanted him to, but he simply couldn't do it."

Robert let loose of me and ran outside to join the others. They all stared in the door at me with great sadness, then turned away and headed for the park.

It was their favorite myth. Seven little boys abandoned by their mothers and taken in by Raccoon. "This is not a story," it begins, "...it's an incident that happened long ago when animals were people." The boys in the myth decided that since their mothers no longer wanted them, they would leave, taking Raccoon with them. They covered their heads and arms with feathers, and could fly. But no matter how many feathers Raccoon put on, he could not. The boys sadly said goodbye to Raccoon and rose into the air. Then they were geese instead of children, and they flew away.

I cursed myself for reading them that myth. Tears ran down my cheeks as I thought of the days the children had spent gathering that bag of feathers, and the dreams that would inevitably be shattered. I thought they believed the myth. But they didn't just believe. Robert had taught them to know.

Seven years ago.

I don't think I'll go to the park today. I haven't been well. I went to see the doctor out of habit. "You're just fine," his lips and tongue lied. In his eyes was a great sadness. I wanted to tell him about knowing, but he wouldn't have understood. Perhaps only young children and old people can.

The geese have come early this year. It will be their last visit, for when they leave this time, there will be eight.

Raccoon will finally be able to fly.